

## BOOK REVIEW

KALU, Ogbu U. (ed.), *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities*. Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008. 365 pp. Pbk. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6242-6. \$45.00.

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*Interpreting Contemporary Christianity* is an excellent collection of articles that arose out of a conference in the “Currents in World Christianity Project.” The aim was to reflect on the recent expansion of Christianity in terms that go beyond simple concepts of globalization that are often employed. From the outset it is noted that this expansion is largely within southern and Pentecostal forms of Christianity, and hence they form a focus to the book. In some ways the book naturally develops some of the concerns found in Dempster, Klaus and Petersen’s *The Globalization of Pentecostalism* (1999) but with a more detailed understanding of globalization.

In providing an overview of the argument that the book advances, Ogbu Kalu notes how Christianity is inherently a religion of movement and sharing within the whole earth. He draws on the argument of Philip Jenkins regarding the creation of a world Christianity within which the “South” plays a key part. Key to this growth, in his view, has been the Western missionary movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries built on the “voluntarist” principle. Summarizing the twentieth-century, Kalu sees periods of internationalism, globalization and disintegration as having led to a focus on both the global and the local. He suggests that Pentecostal and charismatic forms of church as the “new global Christianity” are forms that also embody the “indigenous principle” whereby there is a local translation of the global ideas (or “flows” in his terminology). In support of this Kalu speaks of the multi-centred origins of “Spirit-type Christianity,” and this understanding fits well with that developed by Allan Anderson, although Anderson is surprisingly not referred to in this book (p. 10). Rather, Kalu draws on the work of Lamin Sanneh who speaks of world Christianity as “a variety of indigenous responses” to the global Christianity that has been shared (p. 11). He links these responses with an ecumenical ideology that sees a global Christian faith through the dialogue of indigenous forms. Thus both the global and the local are important in considering the expansion of

Christianity, and Kalu speaks of these as “global processes” and “local identities,” which are terms used throughout the book.

The use of the term “global processes” rather than “globalization” implies the need to critique the latter term in the light of particular experiences, and three chapters are devoted to this. Jehu Hanciles reflects on globalization as it affects African Christianity and notes that “globalization is not an all-encompassing phenomenon. Not only is it experienced unevenly throughout the world but also its dynamic involves marginalization and exclusion” (p. 72). Globalization is often seen as a negative Western force that causes marginalization by forcing Western ways and terms onto non-Western nations, and by encouraging dependency. Dana Robert offers a study of the Protestant missionary movement between the World Wars which she argues gave rise to an internationalization, the “first globalization” of Christianity. Yet this came with a localization: “A primary missionary contribution to Christian internationalism was the active promotion of indigenization in non-Western Christianity: the vision of the church as a worldwide panoply of different cultures and heritages” (p. 105). Theologically, the key to this was a focus on “the separation of Christ from Western culture” as a natural response to the horrors of the First World War seen as fought by Western Christian nations (p. 105). It was seen that “interpreting Jesus Christ according to each culture was a vital task for indigenous Christians” rather than something done for them by Western missionaries (p. 114).

There are four chapters that examine specific examples of the localizing transformations that the charismatic and Pentecostal traditions bring to globalization. Edith Blumhofer examines Pandita Ramabai and the Pentecostal revival in India. Her insightful study traces Ramabai’s life and suggests that the world-wide longing for revival and the evidence of the Welsh revival stimulated the indigenous revival Ramabai experienced in 1905. This was separate from the Pentecostal experience of Spirit baptism at Azusa Street but was followed by many meetings with Pentecostals. Here is an example of a revival influenced by and later contributing to global processes and yet one that was truly indigenous. Feiya Tao presents a study of the Jesus movement in China as an example of the development of the Chinese indigenous church. He suggests that the movement was influenced by Pentecostalism, but also by Chinese Taoism, Confucianism and the social gospel prevalent in the world of that time. Tao argues that it was the movement’s particular combination of aspects of these global understandings that created the example of a truly contextual Christianity in China. Diane Stinton provides a study of Jesus as Chief/King in Ghanaian Christianity, arguing that the theme is representative of both the indigenous and the universal nature of Christianity. It is a theme that draws on Western royal images of Christ, Akan religion and aspects of traditional societies combined in ways that form an indigenous faith.

In summary, *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity* provides a strong argument for a nuanced approach to global and local issues in Christian faith, one that goes beyond simple use of the terms “globalization” and “indigenous.” The interaction between the global and the local is often complex, and takes into account religious and wider experience and belief systems. The terms “global

processes” and “local identities” are shown as a productive way into a more nuanced debate, although not all the contributors use them. Significant recognition is given to the contribution of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements to the contemporary expansion of Christianity although the book sadly lacks interaction with the wealth of contemporary Pentecostal-charismatic scholarship. Some contributors reduce Pentecostalism to a form of evangelicalism, and there is little detailed engagement with Pentecostal understandings of the role and gifts of the Holy Spirit in mission. Yet despite this, the book represents a significant contribution to a vital theme with a challenge to recognize the diversity of global processes and the local Christian identities that interact in the expansion of Christianity.